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New logistics picture a reality

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US commanders in Iraq now have a map-based, real-time logistics picture on and off the battlefield thanks to the US Army's Battle Command Sustainment Support System (**BCS3**).

The system, first fielded to the 3rd Infantry Division in June 2004, has since been proved in Operation 'Iraqi Freedom'. It fuses sustainment, in-transit and force data to provide a Logistics Common Operating Picture (LCOP).

Demonstrating the system at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies and Defence Events Management's Focused Logistics Conference in London on 7 - 8 April, Northrop Grumman **BCS3** senior manager Richard Schwartzman said **BCS3** provided a solution long desired by logistics managers.

"When people here [at the conference] talk about the coupling bridge, they want to be able to show the flow of assets from home base to deployed base, they want to bring light to that tunnel. But that capacity exists today through **BCS3**," Schwartzman said.

The system had been developed, he said, after preparations for Operation 'Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan identified the inadequacies of the existing Combat Service Support Control System (CSSCS).

Using a commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) IBM laptop, **BCS3** software and hardware insertion provides commanders with actionable logistics information and a visual logistics picture of the battlefield.

BCS3 gives a map-centric display of the LCOP using standard Microsoft Windows operating systems, with real-time data updates tailored to suit the individual logistics manager's needs. The situation is displayed over topographic details selected by the user from a menu of available mapping features.

Schwartzman said the "slightly ruggedised" $3,000, 2.7 kg IBM laptops, the same platform used by US special forces in Afghanistan, was a huge improvement on CSSCS, which was a four-man lift at 427 kg and cost $62,000 a unit.

He said the system gave managers the ability to see exactly where ordered equipment was on the supply chain, removing the temptation to multiple order and preventing bottlenecks by setting priorities for the flow of equipment.

Commanders can conduct logistics operations on the unclassified networks using standard internet encryption and, through the secure guard, migrate logistics information to the classified network to fulfil the logistics portion of the joint operating picture. Schwartzman said there were some 1,000 systems fielded with the US Army, with several hundred being used in Iraq. The US Army is hailing the introduction of **BCS3** as a major step forward in acquisition innovation.

The system meets US Army requirements identified early in 2004 by connecting logisticians, integrating the supply chain, improving force reception and modernising theatre distribution.

BSC3 assistant product manager Major Sandy Vann-Olejasz said the team was required to reach the "good enough" standard (provide capabilities needed by the current forces), which helped them streamline the development process through software insertion.

Without having to perfect the system before actual testing, the team cut the development time from several years to less than eight months.